



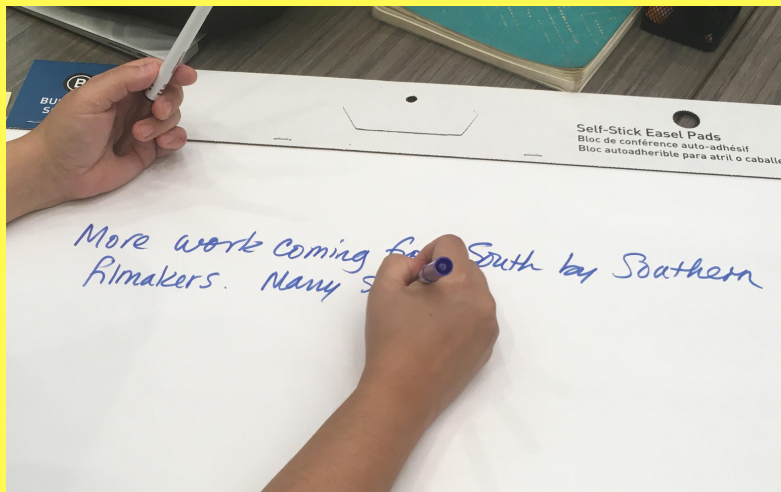
SOUTH SUMMIT REPORT

New Orleans Film Society organized our inaugural South Summit on October 22, 2018, with a goal of convening just a small portion of the robust brain-trust that gathers at our flagship event, the New Orleans Film Festival. We endeavored to **collectively envision what it means for Southern filmmaking to thrive**.

The South Summit convened a group of **47 national, regional, and local media stakeholders** at the Greater New Orleans Foundation. In an effort to broaden the dialogue to include many important voices who could not be in the room, New Orleans Film Society surveyed **100 filmmakers from 12 Southern states**, including Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, Tennessee, and Virginia. **22 industry representatives** also completed the survey.

We heard directly from filmmakers and thought leaders whose work inspires us to **imagine new possibilities for a Southern identity** and the nation's understanding of our region, and mapped the challenges and opportunities unique to the South.





Below you will find a summary of the responses to our surveying efforts, combined with notes from the Summit's break-out conversations.

The survey responses, in full, are also available at:
<http://bit.ly/southsummitresults>

We deeply appreciate the generosity of spirit with which our participants reflected and visioned with us as part of the inaugural South Summit. We look forward to continuing and deepening this conversation in partnership with other festivals and organizations, and at the New Orleans Film Festival to come, and to using the insights we've gleaned to influence our organization's approach to filmmaker support.

We hope that the resulting document will be impactful for organizations who wish to better understand and resource the Southern film community—it was **created to be shared & to instigate sharing**, and we look forward to your thoughts!

SINCERELY,

FALLON YOUNG
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
FALLON@NEWORLEANSFILMSOCIETY.ORG

CLINT BOWIE
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
CLINT@NEWORLEANSFILMSOCIETY.ORG

SOUTH SUMMIT
MONDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2018

PARTICIPANTS

Samantha Aldana , NOFS Emerging Voices mentee	Zac Manuel , exhibiting filmmaker #NOFF2018
Jeanelle Augustin , Sundance Institute	Richard Martinez , Greater New Orleans Foundation
Clint Bowie , New Orleans Film Society	Darcy McKinnon , New Orleans Video Access Center
Jasmine Bowles , Southern Documentary Fund	Sherri McConnell , Creative Industry Policy Advisor
Susan Brennan , Second Line Stages	Kiyoko McCrae , New Orleans Film Society
Trey Burvant , Louisiana Film Entertainment Association	Carroll Morton , Film New Orleans
Andrew Catauro , JustFilms, Ford Foundation	Molly Murphy , Working Films
Mridu Chandra , Tribeca Film Institute IF/Then	Masashi Niwano , CAAMFest
Casey Coleman , Court 13 Arts	Bryce Norbitz , Tribeca Film Institute
Rob Davis , RiverRun International Film Festival	Jolene Pinder , #CreateLouisiana
Luisa Dantas , Filmmaker	Nick Price , ReelSouth UNC-TV
Jax Deluca , National Endowment for the Arts	Michelle Ramos , Alternate Roots
Felix Endara , The Foundation for a Just Society	Saleem Reshamwala , NOFS Southern Producers Lab
Christopher Escobar , Atlanta Film Festival	Joann Ricci , Greater New Orleans Foundation/NOFS Board
Leslie Fields-Cruz , Black Public Media	Sapana Sakya , Center for Asian American Media
Seth Gadsden , IndieGrits Labs	Jennifer Samani , New Orleans Film Society
Michael Gibbons , Creative Capital	Russell Sheaffer , Artless Media / Magnifying Glass Grants
Zack Godshall , exhibiting filmmaker #NOFF2018	Chris Stelly , Louisiana Entertainment
Stephen Gong , Center of Asian American Media	Erica Deiparine-Sugars , Austin Film Society
Emily Harrold , exhibiting filmmaker #NOFF2018	Kareem Tabsch , O-Cinema, Miami
Matthew Hashiguchi , exhibiting filmmaker #NOFF2018	Pilar Timpone , exhibiting filmmaker #NOFF2018
Teresa Hollingsworth , South Arts	Angela Tucker , Filmmaker
Jason Fitzroy Jeffers , Art Center South Florida	Chloe Walters-Wallace , Firelight Media
Andrew Lee , NOFS Southern Producer's Lab	Josh Yates , exhibiting filmmaker #NOFF2018
Jasmin Lopez , NOFS Emerging Voices alum	Fallon Young , New Orleans Film Society

**+100 virtual participants
who completed the
survey**



FILMMAKERS CREATE IN THE SOUTH BECAUSE:

- **There is an urgent need for work that amplifies messages of social change and confronts stereotypes about the South and the communities here**
- **Filmmakers want to facilitate access to stories that are not as often told and amplify voices from their communities through nuanced and place-based storytelling**
- **It's home, and there's a self-reflexive desire to interrogate one's identity**
- **Cost of living more affordable than in production hubs like NY and LA**

"I feel a certain responsibility to ask deep questions about my home and its people, including how my home has shaped my own identity. I remain curious about the identity of the South, which is at times, dichotomous. I find that questions about the South rarely come with easy answers, and often the lines between differing systems of belief are blurred. This dynamic keeps me interested and coming back to ask more questions." – **Zac Manuel, New Orleans, Louisiana**

"I create art in the South because it's also where I live. It's more affordable, and there is more enthusiasm overall from the public here. The South is also ground zero for a lot of social issues, so it's an important location for documentary for sure." – **PJ Raval, Austin, Texas**

"The South is where I'm from, and not only in spite of, but in fact because of its troubled past and its sub-tropical summers, it has a texture to it, a uniqueness, a flavor that is unique and inspiring. One only has to look at it in musical terms: jazz came from the South, blues came from the South, rock n' roll came from the South. The South is struggle and struggle makes great art."
– **Christian Walker, Memphis, Tennessee**

"I am creating art in the South because I find the South to be the most inspiring, igniting place for my creativity. Also, because I am from the South and feel that I owe Southern culture for my growth and development as a human and creative person, I create art here to honor where I am from and to allow Southerners to be the authors of our cultural identity, rather than statistics, "outsiders," or other adverse entities that tend to fail with getting the full picture. In sum, the South is as vital to my art as it is to my humanity, and I owe this region for that." – **Hanna Miller, Collins, Mississippi**

"Southern voices are either misrepresented or underrepresented. I feel it is important to make work about or as the world you perceive. Perspective has always been a priority in my work, not only because of this but in part because of this." – **Daniel Laabs, Dallas, Texas**



WHAT ABOUT THE SOUTH SPECIFICALLY SUSTAINS, EMPOWERS, OR INSPIRES FILMMAKERS?

- **The spirit, originality, and generosity of Southerners**
- **The stories—the tensions, grit, struggles, and contradictions endemic to the South—and a desire to “tell our own stories”**
- **Strong sense of self, ancestry, family, and place**

“Community engagement. The ways in which we work together, the inherent interdependence, and interest in each other. The cultural practices that derive from isolation, disenfranchisement and ugly histories. The unique landscapes and the ways in which the landscapes and histories and people interact.” – **Darcy McKinnon, New Orleans, Louisiana**

“I think the biggest thing is that there are so many incredible Southern stories that I come across...and relatively few filmmakers working in the South to explore these stories. Also because this is where I grew up, there are issues, themes, histories, and experiences that I’ve come to realize are uniquely Southern, but also wonderful topics for films. I also in general care about and am interested in stories from my home.” – **Emily Harrold, Orangeburg, South Carolina / New York, New York**

“The depth of unique characters first and foremost.” – **Jimmy Andrews, Meridian, Mississippi**

“There's a strong sense of mythos here. My work oscillates between fact and fallacy and could often be best described as an absurd folktale. This region is rich with those kinds of narratives and I am deeply moved each time I encounter a Southern tale. Each corner of this region has a compelling story waiting to be unearthed.” – **Adam Forrester, Atlanta, Georgia**

“It's a combination of the playing field being stacked against me and the incredible friends and collaborators who push me to keep going in spite of this reality. I'm also inspired by the culture here and all the stories that haven't been told or told through a southern filmmaker's lens. We have such an opportunity to reshape how the world views the South as a region.” – **Abraham Felix, Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

“Many of the answers we seek to the most complex issues (racism, poverty, health, prison systems, etc.) of our nation are hidden here in the south. If I don't tell our stories, who will?” – **Kenna J. Moore, New Orleans, Louisiana**



WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES FACING SOUTHERN FILMMAKERS?

- In some cases, filmmakers noted a lack of community and resources and others noted strong, talented tight-knit communities that are scrappy but overtaxed; everywhere funding and general lack of arts support was the major challenge
- Geographic isolation— 86% of filmmakers reported some sense of this: feeling disconnected and lacking opportunities to collaborate with artists who are better connected to investment opportunities or to the investment, funding, distribution opportunities themselves
- Social and political conservatism that inhibits artistic expression and further isolates marginalized communities
- Lack of experienced producers based in the South and film industry infrastructure (financing, casting, distribution, and affordable gear in quantity and in proximity)
- Competition from better-funded “outsiders” to tell Southern stories; larger productions are still looking to NY and LA based directors without realizing the talent pool available
- A lack of commercial industry significant enough to satisfy the needs of the number of freelance and independent filmmakers who live here

“There is a sense in the larger film community that the work we do in the South is ‘regional’ or somehow not ‘mainstream.’ Working to make Southern voices more ‘mainstream’ seems important to make sure that our stories are not deemed too niche or not considered universal on the scale of the festival circuit or audiences.” – **Pilar Timpane, Durham, North Carolina**

“Geographic isolation is one of the biggest issues. I’d love access to more mentors and decision makers. I’d love to be able to collaborate on more projects in the narrative fiction world. I’d love to be able to shadow successful industry people and make more contacts with professionals who can help with opportunities”. – **Via Bia, Virginia**

“Sometimes, I am able to participate in nationwide programs and receive mentorship from all corners of the US, but without being able to be face-to-face with many of the people that are supporting me or who I would like to speak with is a little challenging. There are a handful of career filmmakers in Austin, they are accessible but sometimes I want specificity and diversity and there is just not the quantity of film professionals to afford that.” – **Makena Buchanon, Austin, Texas**



“Unfortunately the South is very politically conservative and as a Black woman my existence isn't respected and valued in some of the most meaningful ways.” – **Iman Sherrington, New Orleans, Louisiana**

“Access to funds, of course. Access to distribution chains that filmmakers in LA and NYC seem to have more readily. Access to like-minded filmmakers. The obvious challenge is how your work is perceived outside the South: work related to the South is put into a narrow category at most festivals.” – **Thomas Southerland, Winston-Salem, North Carolina**

“We barely have access to industry leaders and mentors in North Carolina. I cannot foresee how I can make this a feasible career hence we work other jobs and make films on the weekends. That approach will not change for a long time unless we build a strong network where our work is respected and is taken to a larger audience. We need organizations like Film Independent, IFP and Sundance right here in the South.” – **Aby Rao, Morrisville, North Carolina**

“Geographic isolation and access to industry is definitely an issue, I have some access, but not CASUAL access. From the time I did spend in NYC, this was the best thing about it: Being able to reach out to people or bump into people who I could learn from, or who could lead me to interesting work. We're so spread out that those things rarely happen without intention here, and that's challenging.” – **Saleem Reshamwala, Durham, North Carolina**

HOW ARE SOUTHERN FILMMAKERS FUNDING THEIR PROJECTS?

- **56% Self-funding**
- **21% Family contributions, friends, crowdfunding**
- **17% Institutions/grants**
- **13% Investors**

reflects reported averages

Far and away, most filmmakers reported that they are the primarily self-funding their own work, and respondents noted that, on average, **less than 20% of their funding comes from grants** or institutional funding. The majority of survey responses indicated that they have a significant side hustle or other main gig: arts administrator, teaching, freelance photography, producing, and commercial work. The majority reported an inability to sustain themselves through their filmmaking alone, and noted major challenges in the ability to focus on their creative pursuits.



WHAT COULD FILMMAKERS ACHIEVE WITH MORE FUNDING?

- **Greater collaboration and support for other Southern filmmakers, including remunerated crews, and additional opportunities for mentorship and support other filmmakers' projects**
- **More intentional & personal work, and a more robust body of work, with some mentioning the possibility of an upright production company and a general healthier work/life balance**
- **Marketing, audience-building, and impact work which often gets back-burnered**

"I could employ other Southern filmmakers, producers, editors, and post-production houses. I would spend more money in towns where Southern films are shot. I would schedule screenings and community discussions that serve some type of refreshment, offer access to information, and bring in Southern experts to lead discussions about healing and working together." – **Hanna Miller, Collins, Mississippi**

"Oh wow. So many things! Certain project ideas of mine simply aren't feasible without a budget. I think the biggest impact that better financing would create is hiring local crews. So many of my film crew friends struggle to make a living at their craft (if it's even their primary source of income), simply because they live in certain parts of the South and not enough projects come through. If I/we were better financially resourced, we could hire locally, and not only would that sustain and support the crew we already have here, it would inspire more Southerners to get involved in filmmaking." – **Jeremy Burgess, Birmingham, Alabama**

"I could tell the stories of people who are truly constructing our city and don't have the resources to share their experiences (Latinx immigrants)." – **Gabrielle Garcia Steib, New Orleans, Louisiana**

"I feel the ambition and market potential of my projects could increase as I could make the films higher quality, more accessible, and market-viable. It would help me reach an audience outside my network. It would allow me to take more risks and produce for a greater diversity of filmmakers with nontraditional visions. It would allow me to be the prolific producer I'm capable of being. It would allow me to employ those in my community." – **Makena Buchanon, Austin, Texas**

"Fair compensation for filmmakers and artists representing unique and underrepresented voices, stories and places on screen. It is not enough for us to be more visible, we have to be able to make a living doing it without our ideas, aesthetics, and stories being co-opted by and for others in major cities." – **Kiyoko McCrae, New Orleans, Louisiana**



WHAT WOULD A BETTER RESOURCED SOUTHERN FILMMAKING COMMUNITY YIELD?

- **More robust, collaborative, and enduring film communities; less export of Southern filmmakers and Southern stories**
- **More complex stories about the contemporary South; diverse and infinite narratives that disrupt and subvert what we have come to know as "the South"**
- **More and better representation of Southern voices on the national stage, as well as solidarity across shared narratives among otherwise disparate communities**

"A plethora of new and unique visions and voices. There are so many amazing stories, projects, and movements happening in the South that are beginning to tear down decades of stereotypes and misconceptions about our region. A better resourced filmmaking community would speed this process, amplify movements, begin changing/shifting our field's current structures and rules governing accepted quality/excellence norms (maybe outright tear them down), and create new paths forward for our country as a whole." – **Seth Gadsden, IndieGrits Labs, Columbia, South Carolina**

"More positive stories about survival in the South and thriving in a place where people of different skin colors have always lived together." – **Laura P. Valtorta, Columbia, South Carolina**

"A better resourced filmmaking community in the South would yield more diverse voices if we could create an education network that supports filmmakers of all ages. We would see better representation of the Southern experience from or about different groups in the South from gender, race, religion and sexuality." – **Abbey Hoekzema, Pooler, Georgia**

"The big trend I see is that opportunity and power tend to cling together. I feel that in many cases one person's success has the tendency to stick to that one person and not spread throughout the region or network. One person who finds success is not an aberration to bequeath all opportunity to; one person's success should open doors for others around them in the region. A better resourced film-making community would help share in the wealth." – **Nick Price, UNCTV, Durham, North Carolina**

"It would create a climate where we weren't losing talent to the coasts. It would yield a more sustainable ecosystem, with more jobs and options for Southern creators to make their own work (as opposed to fitting their work in between commercial jobs). A better resourced Southern filmmaking community would reverberate throughout the industry— it would create pathways for Southern work to find national audiences and would lessen the amount of extractive storytelling that takes place here." – **Jolene Pinder, #CreateLouisiana, New Orleans, Louisiana**



WHAT NON-FINANCIAL RESOURCES DO SOUTHERN FILMMAKERS NEED TO FEEL FULLY SUPPORTED?

- More labs and programs designed to build community and networks among filmmakers
- Greater access to gatekeepers for facetime and one-on-one meetings in the South so that filmmakers don't have to expend resources to travel to meet them in NY/LA

"I would like to see support from some of the larger gatekeepers in our industry so that filmmakers feel encouraged to develop their films here instead of having to go to Los Angeles or New York." – **Merced Elizondo, Dallas, Texas**

"Various industry resources. Seems like a whole other world I don't know how to get into. Maybe something like the Sundance labs. People and places to send finished work to or workshop projects with. Many grants are more trouble than they're worth. We find ways to make things without money or very cheaply. We just don't know what to do with them when they're done except dump them online or spend more money than we spend making them submitting to film festivals... Maybe a mentor program of some sort. Quality industry feedback/advice would be very valuable." – **Evan Falbaum, Shreveport, Louisiana**

"More concrete pipelines to producers and financiers." – **Anonymous, Louisville, Kentucky**

"Access to industry contacts, agents, and managers. People in the position to hire filmmakers or represent them should have a better idea of the talent and skill that we know is in the South right now." – **Bryce Norbitz, Tribeca Film Institute**

"There is a tendency in the film community for gatekeepers to say they want unheard-of stories from lesser-known filmmakers, but then when it comes to giving out the money or offering support, they don't follow through... Also, more education and more screening opportunities throughout the south will come hand in hand with increasing communities and hubs of filmmakers—I think in S.C. in particular the community is growing, but for years I knew almost no other filmmakers in S.C. Having more labs and collectives where we can collaborate is also important." – **Emily Harrold, Orangeburg, South Carolina / New York, New York**

"More labs for producers and directors. Opportunities to go to other film festivals and workshops with groups like Southern Producers Lab and network/share. Mentorship! Continuing education opportunities with heavier hitters (a la UnionDocs or DCTV programming) – **Katie Mathews, New Orleans, Louisiana**



WHAT DO INSTITUTIONS BELIEVE ARE THE UNIQUE ASSETS OF THE SOUTHERN FILMMAKING COMMUNITY?

- Talent, authenticity, scrappiness, resourcefulness, voice, empathy
- Strong community support and collaborative spirit
- Deep and rich traditions of storytelling

"I'm particularly struck by the visual vocabulary of filmmakers making work in the South--there's a magical imagination to form and structure that I've seen in the work of Southern filmmakers that is particularly inspiring. A diversity of voices that speak to a range of experiences in a variety (often formally playful) ways." – **Russell Scheaffer, The Magnifying Glass Grants Program**

"Access to a vast network of change agents who, especially within the historical context of the region, know how to resist creatively and build power in today's national context." – **Andrew Catauro, Ford Foundation**

"The Southern filmmaker community has deep cultural roots in storytelling. The kind of storytelling that is the crucial component of all great filmmaking whether it is a documentary or a feature." – **Carroll Morton, City of New Orleans Mayor's Office of Cultural Economy**

WHAT WOULD SOUTHERN-SERVING ORGANIZATIONS DO IF THEY WERE BETTER RESOURCED?

National organizations are interested in doing more events in the South/actively looking for ways to serve Southern filmmakers. Regional organizations are financially under-resourced, but have strong ties to the communities, exhibit creative responses to make the most of what they have, and are able to articulate the needs they wish to fill. Among those needs are:

- Production, post-production, travel, proof of concept, and development grants
- Better facilities and equipment so that local and regional filmmakers could have a place outside of a major urban center that offers resources, support, and refuge
- Traveling exhibition opportunities for Southern filmmakers
- More frequent networking and coalition-building events
- Offer more support for other organizations; some recognized the need to support filmmaker support organizations and festivals who are making an impact in their communities
- Conduct more of their work outside of urban centers in cases where there aren't organizations on the ground serving filmmakers in rural areas





**WANT MORE DETAIL? CLICK HERE OR VISIT
[HTTP://BIT.LY/SOUTHSUMMITRESULTS](http://bit.ly/southsummitresults)
TO DOWNLOAD THE SURVEY RESPONSES IN FULL.**

**FOR A LIST OF FUNDS, PROGRAMS, AND RESOURCES SPECIFICALLY
DESIGNED FOR SOUTHERN FILMMAKERS, CLICK HERE OR VISIT
[HTTP://BIT.LY/SOUTHERNFILMRESOURCES](http://bit.ly/southernfilmresources).**

**THANK YOU FOR READING! WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU—
COMMENTS/QUESTIONS/IDEAS FOR ADVANCING THE
CONVERSATION CAN BE EMAILED TO US. WE'RE A CLICK AWAY.**

**FALLON YOUNG
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
FALLON@NEWORLEANSFILMSOCIETY.ORG**

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ARTISTIC DIRECTOR
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